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LEONARD J. ARRINGTON
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No. 15

THE EMOTIONAL AND PRIESTLY
LOGIC OF PLURAL MARRIAGE

by

Kathleen Flake

October 1, 2009

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Introduction

F. Ross Peterson

The establishment of a lecture series honoring a library's special collections and a donor to that collection is unique. Utah State University's Merrill-Cazier Library houses the personal and historical collection of Leonard J. Arrington, a renowned scholar of the American West. As part of Arrington's gift to the university, he requested that the university's historical collection become the focus for an annual lecture on an aspect of Mormon history. Utah State agreed to the request and in 1995 inaugurated the annual Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture.

Utah State University's Special Collections and Archives is ideally suited as the host for the lecture series. The state's land grant university began collecting records very early, and in the 1960s became a major depository for Utah and Mormon records. Leonard and his wife Grace joined the USU faculty and family in 1946, and the Arringtons and their colleagues worked to collect original diaries, journals, letters, and photographs.

Although trained as an economist at the University of North Carolina, Arrington became a Mormon historian of international repute. Working with numerous colleagues, the Twin Falls, Idaho, native produced the classic *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* in 1958. Utilizing available collections at USU, Arrington embarked on a prolific publishing and editing career. He and his close ally, Dr. S. George Ellsworth, helped organize the Western History Association, and they created the *Western Historical Quarterly* as the scholarly voice of the WHA. While serving with Ellsworth as editor of the new journal, Arrington also helped both the Mormon History Association and the independent journal *Dialogue* get established.

One of Arrington's great talents was to encourage and inspire other scholars or writers. While he worked on biographies or institutional

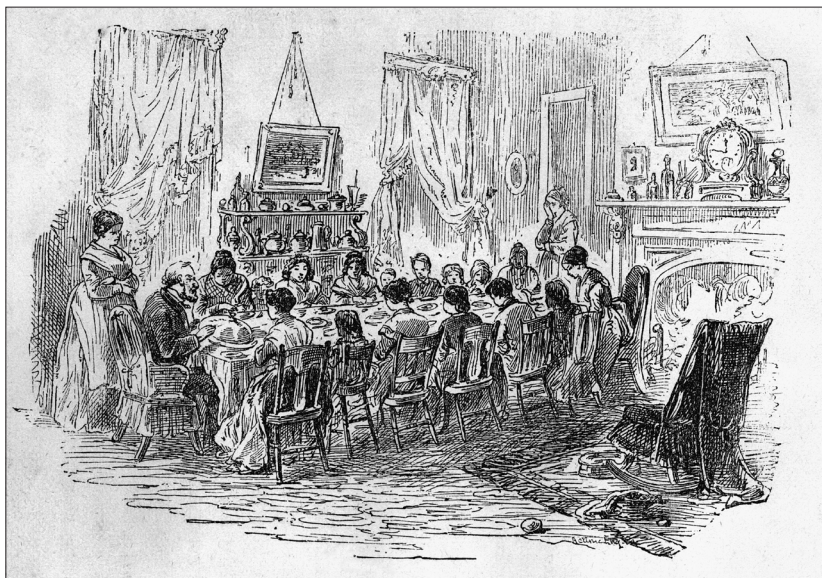
histories, he employed many young scholars as researchers. He fostered many careers as well as arranged for the publication of numerous books and articles.

In 1973, Arrington accepted appointments as the official historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Lemuel Redd Chair of Western History at Brigham Young University. More and more Arrington focused on Mormon, rather than economic, historical topics. His own career flourished with the publication of *The Mormon Experience*, co-authored with Davis Bitton, and *American Moses: A Biography of Brigham Young*. He and his staff produced many research papers and position papers for the LDS Church as well. Nevertheless, tension developed over the historical process, and Arrington chose to move full time to BYU with his entire staff. The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of History was established, and Leonard continued to mentor new scholars as well as publish biographies. He also produced a very significant two-volume study, *The History of Idaho*.

After Grace Arrington passed away, Leonard married Harriet Horne of Salt Lake City. They made the decision to deposit the vast Arrington collection of research documents, letters, files, books, and journals at Utah State University. The Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives is part of the university's Special Collections. The Arrington Lecture Committee works with Special Collections to sponsor the annual lecture.

About the Author

Kathleen Flake is associate professor of American religious history in the Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She is also the author of the book *The Politics of Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Prior to her appointment at Vanderbilt, Professor Flake was a litigation attorney in Washington, D.C. She received her law degree from the University of Utah after completing her undergraduate degree at Brigham Young University. She then obtained a master's degree from Catholic University and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She has published articles in the *Journal of Religion*, *Religion and American Culture*, and the *Journal of Ritual Studies*.



"The Wealthy Polygamist" from Fanny Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy*

THE EMOTIONAL AND PRIESTLY LOGIC OF PLURAL MARRIAGE

The nineteenth century in America was increasingly a time of high romance and low tolerance for Mormonism. Tonight I will discuss the relationship between these trends to better understand the logic of the Saints' marital practices.¹ First, though, let me pause to say a few things about logic. Logic is not an absolute but rather a set of assertions based upon specific premises or assumptions. People who share premises will find the ideas and actions that flow from them logical, while people who don't will find these same ideas and actions illogical, even wrong. This is most obvious when it comes to religious premises. Academic historians of religious behavior do not have a "dog in that fight." We try to limit ourselves to the task of understanding and explaining, or you could say we limit ourselves to asking out of curiosity, not judgment, *what did they think they were doing?* Explanations, like the one I will attempt tonight, often get misunderstood as endorsements, however. So, let me begin by asking you to remember that when I speak of the *logic* of plural marriage, I am not endorsing it or even arguing that it was logical to any but those who practiced it—and not even to all of them. Tonight my goal is limited to analyzing the meanings early Latter-day Saints brought to their marriages that made sense of those marriages—to them.

Fanny Stenhouse was a Latter-day Saint to whom plural marriage did not make sense.² Her chief criticism was that "In polygamic Mormonism, woman is a convenience; in a proper Gentile home, woman is a companion, and this comparison is really more apprehended [or apparent]

1. I am deeply indebted to Jill Mulvay Derr for her insightful comments on the ideas explored in this lecture. I thank also Seth L. Bryant for his able editorial assistance.

2. Fanny was, however, less consistently adverse to plural marriage than admitted by her later writings. See Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 54–55.

than any immoral conduct.”³ For Fanny, it was not immorality, but lack of companionship that distinguished polygamous marriages from monogamous ones. We better understand her point in her description of two sisters. One, a polygamist wife, looked sorrowful “for she has but a share in her husband’s love.” But, the “monogamist [sister] has no such sad expression on her face; for small as her husband’s heart may be, she knows that she alone rules therein—its sole queen and mistress.”⁴ Of her own situation, Stenhouse said, “It was my husband’s society that I yearned for and this fearful Mormonism always deprived me of that. I could not, therefore feel happy.”⁵ Thus, her final indictment of plural marriage: its “chief object” was “to encourage an increase of ‘the kingdom,’ rather than to seek the personal happiness of the married pair.”⁶

Other LDS women were as miserable and as angry as Fanny but for a variety of reasons could not or did not abandon the practice as she did. Some left a record of their travail and their yearning for the undivided love and support of their husbands. Most analyses of plural marriage quote from them, and we, as readers, are rightly sympathetic to the suffering of these women. But what are we to make of those plural marriages that did more than endure and appear to have been a source of human flourishing? Certainly these marriages, no less than the failures, deserve analysis. More than deserve, these marriages are arguably a more useful source for understanding the emotional logic of plural marriage, a logic that escaped those who preferred monogamy, as did Fanny, who said, “Men marry the women: the women divorce the men; and this is about the only rational and just thing there is in connexion [*sic*] with the Mormon marriages.”⁷

When modern historians of polygamy look for its rationale, their conclusions do not differ much from those of nineteenth-century critics. The consensus seems to be that plural marriage merely comprised another layer of patriarchy in an already extraordinarily hierarchical church. It was primarily an instrument of social control, over both men and women, but especially oppressive of women. Finally, plural marriage

3. Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady’s Life Among the Mormons*, edited by Linda Wilcox DeSimone, (1872; new edition, Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008), 154.

4. Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy*, 144.

5. *Ibid.*, 63.

6. *Ibid.*, 130.

7. *Ibid.*, 134.

was designed to monopolize power (and resources) by creating dynastic alliances among Mormonism's ruling class. It must be admitted, however, that each of these charges has been brought against monogamy as well. Thus, that certain plural marriages may have had any of these intentions or effects—oppression of women, social control, or aggregation of power—does not rule out other possibilities. It is these other intentions and effects of plural marriage that I would like to scrutinize tonight. I do this partly out of contrariness. I am suspicious of the general tendency to see only one side of any story. On the other hand, admitting my own monogamous biases, I am genuinely curious about the fact that some people did thrive under this form of human relationship. In short, I want to know what they thought they were doing. I want to understand how they made sense of their marriages when everyone else thought they were irrational and unjust, as well as immoral. What was the logic that ordered their lives?

My thesis is that the Saints' rejection of romantic marital norms was not exclusively or even primarily a psychological defense or practical necessity caused by having to "share love," as Fanny put it. Rather, I will argue that the Saints' ideology and practice of "plurality" expressed a positive ethic and religious identity related to their priestly ideals. Or, another way to put it is that I suspect that the nineteenth century conflict between monogamy and polygamy was about more than the number of sexual partners in the marriage. My hypothesis is that one possible source for that something else was the priestly character of early Mormon marriage, especially as it related to women and contradicted American nineteenth-century marital ideals. Let's begin by looking at those ideals.

Obviously, just about everybody, including the Mormons themselves, thought plural marriage violated universally held norms for marriage. With the benefit of hindsight, however, we know that those norms were not as stable or even as traditional as they seemed at the time. The truism is true: what is most strongly held is often clutched by a nervous hand. Indeed, by 1850, marriage had been in flux for three centuries, at least. That flux was energized by new philosophies of personhood and social contract, by new economic practices with their widening markets, as well as by innovative theologies of human agency and God's providence. When combined with political revolution that overturned hierarchies, both political and domestic, these social forces produced a new

marital ideal based on individual choice and companionate love. This was a big change. For centuries marriage had been designed primarily to ensure progeny and to protect patrimonial wealth or, among the lower classes, for economic survival. This didn't mean that people didn't love each other. It simply meant that love was not the reason for getting married. Rather, love was the ideal effect of marriage.

Studies show that by the American Revolution, however, emotional fulfillment or happiness had become the preferred motive for marriage twice as often as wealth.⁸ It took only another fifty years for this preference to become a norm: one not only could, but should marry for love. As sociologist Stephanie Coontz puts it in her survey, *Marriage, a History*: "By the middle of the nineteenth century there was near unanimity . . . that the love-based marriage, in which the wife stayed home protected and supported by her husband, was a recipe for heaven on earth."⁹ Dora Greenwell's 1863 poem conveniently entitled "Home" lists the ingredients of that recipe:

Two birds within one nest;
Two hearts within one breast;
Two souls within one fair
Firm league of love and prayer,
Together bound for aye, forever blest.
An ear that waits to catch
A hand upon the latch;
A step that hastens its sweet rest to win; `
A world of strife shut out,
A world of love shut in.¹⁰

This was the new marriage and the only good marriage in Victorian America. It was based on love and defined by the soulful, even symbiotic companionship it produced. The two became one: "one fair Firm league of love and prayer." The couple's emotional oneness was even firmer:

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8. Herman Lantz et al., "Pre-Industrial Patterns in the Colonial Family in America: A Contents Analysis of Colonial Magazines," *American Sociological Review* 33 (June 1968): 414.
 9. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking Adult, 2005), 163.
 10. Dora Greenwell, "Home," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, edited by Deirdre David, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69. Note that David contests the reading of this poem as an uncomplicated endorsement of romantic marriage, finding in it a second meaning that does not "annul" the first, but serves as a commentary on it. *Ibid.*, 69–70. Cf. Coontz, *Marriage* 163, for whom the poem is used, as it is here, as "just an abbreviated version of the Victorian veneration for home."

“two hearts” beat in “one breast.” The logic expressed in this poem had many implications for the meaning of marriage. Marital oneness suggested a necessary equality of status and a sameness of loving attention, though gender distinctions in love’s expression were considered natural. One spouse, presumably the wife, was perfectly attuned in an attitude of receptivity: she was “an ear that waits.” The other, her husband, vigorously returned. He was “a step that hastens” to the “sweet rest” provided by her virtuous presence and domestic arts. The couple’s daily reunion restored the oneness that defined their marriage as a domestic heaven that shut out earthly strife and shut in love.

Mormonism’s nineteenth-century marriage practices seemed to contradict these marital ideals in every respect. At least that is what Elizabeth Kane expected to find when, in 1872, she accompanied her husband, Thomas, to southern Utah at the invitation of his friend Brigham Young. Along the way, they visited several LDS homes, as well as spent the winter living in St. George’s polygamous society. Like Fanny, Elizabeth had married for love and was dedicated to the companionate ideal, deeply regretting every separation from an adventurous husband. She was devotedly Presbyterian; socially well placed; active in the movement for women’s equality; and, of course, critical of Mormon marital practices. Not threatened by having to live “the Principle,” however, Elizabeth brought not just a critical eye, but also a relatively open mind to her firsthand examination of Mormon marriages. Some of you may have been introduced to Elizabeth’s observations through Claudia Bushman’s 1999 Arrington Lecture.¹¹ As you will see I am indebted to her for some of my observations, but admittedly have directed her conclusions to my own point.

Elizabeth Kane was surprised by what she found in Utah’s polygamous homes, both grand and simple.¹² Essentially, she was surprised that, notwithstanding their multiplicity of partners, their relationships conformed substantially to her ideal of Victorian domesticity. She was

11. Claudia Bushman, “Mormon Domestic Life in the 1870s,” *Collected Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lectures* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005), 91–118.

12. During their sojourn in Utah from the fall of 1872 to the spring of 1873, the Kanes’ exposure to Mormon families was not limited to those of high status. They observed also several “simple” homes, such as the one constituted by the blind “Mr. T” and his two wives, who had experienced “all the afflictions of Job in the way of losses of cattle and other property.” [Elizabeth Wood Kane], *Twelve Mormon Homes Visited in Succession on a Journey through Utah to Arizona* (Philadelphia: William Wood, 1874), 125.

especially surprised to find among plural spouses a depth of emotional attachment that she considered romantic love. She noted that wives were not treated as a collective, but as individuals. At times, this was confusing. It was not uncommon for wives to be brought separately, though in close succession, to be introduced to Elizabeth simply as “my wife Mrs. X,” treating each as if she were the only Mrs. X. This not only surprised but amused Elizabeth, since each wife was given the benefit of the same introductory conversation, giving Elizabeth a nineteenth century version of *Groundhog Day*.¹³ Nevertheless, this and other experiences like it demonstrated a degree of individualism or sense of parity within plural marriages that she assumed impossible. More surprising to her was the extent to which plural marriage produced intense emotional attachments. For example, she had a conversation with a “Mrs. D” in Salt Lake City about a recently widowed man. Elizabeth admitted saying sarcastically that he would soon find another wife. Mrs. D missed the tone and simply responded that “of course” he would, but this was irrelevant to the man’s grief. Her own husband, she said, had “had three bereavements since we were married, and . . . He seemed so lost, we . . . scarcely knew how to comfort him.” The “we meaning the other wives!” Elizabeth exclaimed.¹⁴ Meeting another husband who carried a daguerreotype of a wife dead two years, Elizabeth thought to herself “Here at last . . . is one man high in Mormon esteem yet a monogamist,” only to learn that he had three other wives.¹⁵

Second, Elizabeth was surprised by the relationship among the wives themselves. When the daguerreotype of the deceased wife was shown, the other wives spontaneously began lamenting *their* loss of her. One, said Elizabeth, “wept herself as she eulogized ‘Sister Helen’s’ virtues.”¹⁶ More shocking, however, was a story that arose in the context of Elizabeth’s thanking Maggie McDiarmid for dessert and discovering their shared belief in the superiority of Scottish wedding cakes with their nougat filling. Maggie, delighted to find someone who appreciated the delicacy, told Elizabeth that she had been so thrilled to find a “a Scotch brother

13. Elizabeth Wood Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah's Dixie, 1872-73* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 2001), 2–3, online at <<http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/tanner&CISOPTR=1338>>.

14. Kane, *Twelve Homes*, 55.

15. *Ibid.*, 93.

16. *Ibid.*, 94.

in Salt Lake who knew how to concoct it [that] she had ordered one as a wedding present—to her husband's last wife!"

Elizabeth wanted to think the story "showed unconsciously how thoroughly [Maggie] . . . had 'mortified the flesh' at the call of imagined duty, or else how devoid of jealousy she was by nature." But she knew that the Scottish Maggie was both "quick tempered and very warm-hearted." Thus, Elizabeth admitted, "I can only realize [or imagine] a wife's being contented to have her husband married to another if she has ceased to care for him herself, so that it is a matter of indifference to her where his affections are." Yet, again, Elizabeth knew by experience that "[Maggie] and her husband are on very different terms [than that of indifference]. There is something in their manner to each other which, if they were not Mormons, would gladden the heart of an old novel reader like myself as proof that after twenty years of wedlock; there could still be married lovers." Elizabeth was dumbfounded: "The first wife gives the husband to the new one. I *cannot* realize [imagine] how she can bring herself to do it."¹⁷

It was, however, at the Steerforths of Nephi that Elizabeth was, she said, made "an inmate of the household long enough to see . . . the unconscious tokens of a tender intimacy between the wives themselves."¹⁸ When asked, the two women explained their love for one another in terms of a "bond of daily habit and propinquity [proximity]," saying "in our home, each of us has a friend whose interests are identical with her own, who can share all the joys and troubles of the family, and to whom she can impart her feelings regarding its head without fear of violating that sacred confidence which may not be shared with any outside friend." After repeating this conversation, Elizabeth again turned to her reader and asked, "Can you imagine anything [while] sober—more insane? I listened with perfect composure. I was under no temptation to laugh, . . . even when they spoke most confidently of their solution of life's problems." Paradoxically, the Steerforths' solution was what most would say was their problem.¹⁹

17. Kane, *A Gentile Account*, 123–24.

18. Kane, *Twelve Homes*, 77.

19. *Ibid.*, 53. The intimacy and strength of women's relationships may have served as a counter balance to the patriarchal structures in which they lived. The record of these relationships is so powerful and ubiquitous that it is curious scholars have not been interested in analyzing their effect on men personally or their relation to the formal structuring of the LDS

Thus, Elizabeth's account of women's bonds in plural marriage depicts more than a morally laudable renunciation of jealousy. As Dr. Bushman concluded in her study, "While these women loved and respected their husbands, the wives themselves often moved in interesting counterpoint, almost like a married couple themselves."²⁰ Applying the term *marriage* to the women's relationships helps us see the aptitude of the much-contested label *polygamy*. Most writers on the subject will grouse that the proper term should be *polygyny*, since these were marriages of one man to many women. But the label used by the Saints implied the sense of many marriages, or a network of marriages, not just many spouses. This is the sense implicit also in Elizabeth's description of the families she lived with in the winter of 1872. Some plural marriages, it appeared, could produce a "fair, firm league of love and prayer."

One of the implications of this league of multiple marriages was that emotional commitments could not be a closed circuit: two hearts did not beat in one breast. As Elizabeth observed, "A curious difference between Mormon women and those of an Eastern harem appears in their independence."²¹ Though the comparison to Muslim marriage may fail for her prejudicial assumptions about it, Elizabeth was on firmer ground when she elaborated on the independence of plural wives by contrasting it to that of their American monogamous counterparts. "So many of them," she said, "seem to have the entire management, not only of their families, but of their households and even outside business affairs, as if they were widows."²² Elizabeth's implied explanation is the generally accepted one today—namely, that plural wives were *de facto* widows of husbands on lengthy missions or sleeping in other beds. There was, however, more than necessity at work in the independence Elizabeth observed.

Indeed, it appears that, in marriage, Mormons privileged independence over emotional attunement. Those who thrived in plural marriage said so explicitly. Mary Isabella Horne was invited by an interviewer to compare her experience in polygamy to the twenty-eight years she had lived with her husband monogamously. She said matter-of-factly,

Church's gendered hierarchy, especially given the pervasiveness of plural marriage among the Mormon elite.

20. Bushman, "Mormon Domestic Life," 111.

21. Kane, *A Gentile Account*, 39.

22. *Ibid.*

“Plural marriage destroys the oneness, of course,” but to her that oneness had meant “she was so bound and so united to her husband that she could do nothing without him.” Though it had been a “trial of her feelings” to lose it, she could now “see some advantages;” namely, “she is freer and can do herself individually things she never could have attempted before; and work out her individual character as separate from her husband.”²³ Again, this and other credible accounts of successful plurality in marriage show more than a disciplined restraint of jealousy and pragmatic response to their husbands’ absence. They indicate also that, for those who thrived in plural marriage, psychological individuation and the emotional independence it produced were deemed virtues in their own right.

This is illustrated by a “love story” which Elizabeth found “very sad” and “too . . . thoroughly Mormon” not to add to her journal. While living in St. George she met a couple—“a fragile girlish looking creature, with dark hair and great sorrowful looking brown eyes” who, sang a duet with her “youthful looking” husband, whose “gifts sparkled on her wasted fingers” and who “seemed very much attached to her,” though the song they sang was about the anguish of separation.²⁴ He had met her on his mission. Whether love of him had converted her, Elizabeth did not know, but he had brought her home to join his other two wives. Now, for love of her, he neglected them, and, for love of him, she neglected her baby by insisting on joining him wherever he was sent on a mission. To Elizabeth, their love was heroic, but not so for her hosts. “The censure of the Church was,” said Elizabeth, “upon the infatuated pair, and it was thought she would stick [or, we would say, stop] at nothing in her effort to surround him with her love so entirely that his thoughts should never stray to the other wives.”²⁵ Such symbiotic attunement was not an ideal in Mormondom. As Fanny Stenhouse reported of her experience in the Church: “the companionship of soul; the devotion of a refined and pure affection; the indissoluble union of two existences—were never presented” as the object of marriage.²⁶

23. Mrs. Joseph [Isabella] Horne, “Migration and Settlement of the Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 1884,” original on file in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Banc mss. P-F 24.

24. Kane, *A Gentle Account*, 131.

25. *Ibid.*, 132.

26. Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *Tell It All: the Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism: An Autobiography* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1874), 343.

Dissolution of the self in another was for women like Isabella Horne a marital problem (albeit a lovely one) to be solved. It was a bondage that limited the development of their character and capacity to act. Again, one could argue that emotional independence was a necessity, not a benefit of plural marriage. But this would simply restate Elizabeth's puzzle. What she considered the problem with plural marriage, the women she met experienced as a solution. In the interest of time, let me give the last word to Dr. Romania Pratt Penrose, who left one plural marriage but joined another because "though it be a fiery furnace at some period in our life, it [plural marriage] will prove the one thing needful to cleanse and purify our inmost soul of selfishness, jealousy, and other mundane attributes."²⁷ Among those "mundane [or worldly] attributes" was, I am suggesting, the Victorian ideal of an "indissoluble union of two existences." So, let us take up Romania's statement that the logic of plural marriage can be found in its serving as a means of cleansing its practitioners of the mundane and purifying them or, in other words, making them holy. Let's turn to the temple rituals that created these marriages to see if there's any evidence of this intention, or what I am calling a priestly logic, to plural marriage.

But, first, I need to make sure we are all on the same page about what it is to be a priest. Most simply, a priest is one who has the right to access the powers of heaven and to mediate or exercise those heavenly powers for the benefit of others on earth. The most obvious example is in the biblical account of the priests of Aaron, who were set apart (or given rights) to make sacrifices for Israel and, thereby, maintain its covenant relationship to God. Mormonism had, from its beginnings, ordained men to priestly offices and structured them in councils that authorized them to perform Christian versions of covenant maintenance, namely, sacramental actions.²⁸ In 1842, Joseph Smith placed women within that structure when he directed the ordination of Emma Smith to preside over a women's council called the Female Relief Society. He instructed the Society that their purpose was "not only to relieve the poor but to save souls" and they would be empowered to accomplish that purpose

27. Romania B. Pratt Penrose, "Memoir of Romania B. Pratt, M.D." (1881), http://jared.pratt-family.org/parley_family_histories/romania_bunnell_memoirs.html.

28. See Gregory Prince, *Power from On High: The Development of the Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1995), 11–13.

by joining the men in newly revealed temple rituals.²⁹ As Bishop Newel K. Whitney told the Society, “without the female all things cannot be restor’d to the earth—it takes all to restore the Priesthood.”³⁰ Why? Because Joseph Smith had declared that marriage itself was an “order of the priesthood” without which the highest heaven could not be obtained.³¹ Now, a lot could be said about this, but I’m trying to be disciplined and say only one thing and a rather small thing as it relates to the emotional quality of those temple-solemnized plural marriages that thrived. Specifically, the small point I am making tonight is that the mutually interdependent, priestly identity conferred through temple marriage stood in opposition to the romantic oneness that defined men’s and women’s relationship in Victorian marriage. Since the priestly identity of men is generally accepted, I will consider the evidence for women’s priestly identity in the plural marriage ceremony.

There are two trustworthy, public sources for the ceremony. The most complete version was published in 1852 by Orson Pratt, as part of his unenviable assignment to explain plural marriage to the world. Let’s begin, however, with the record of an earlier plural marriage ceremony performed by Bishop Newel Whitney in Nauvoo in 1842. Though a bishop in the church, Newel Whitney did not explain his right to officiate in the marriage of his daughter Sarah Ann to Joseph Smith in terms of church office. Instead, he claimed a priestly authority that was both personal to him as a father and broadly held by his family, living and dead. He was, he said, officiating in “my own name and in the name of my wife your mother.” Belief in patriarchal rights to perform marriages had a long tradition, including among the Puritans from whom most early Mormons sprang. This was largely because civil marriages were considered adequate in light of marriage’s temporal character. Marriage was part of God’s earthly creation as modeled in the Garden; it was not a heavenly institution. Very uncommon, however, were Whitney’s references to the authority of his wife and, secondly, that of “Holy Progenitors.” This authority, he stated, was possessed by all of them “by the right of birth which is of Priest Hood.” He announced that this priestly birthright was

29. “Relief Society Minutes,” 9 June 1842, LDS Church Library, Salt Lake City.

30. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1842.

31. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *History of the [LDS] Church*, Volume 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1902), 392–93. These “Remarks of the Prophet at Ramus” were later canonized as Doctrine & Covenants 131:1–4.

“vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the living God obtained by the Holy Melchesdick . . . and other of the Holy Fathers.” These words tell us that Whitney considered himself and his wife to have divine authority and that this authority had been passed onto them as a birthright from a line of “Holy Progenitors.” The birthright was, however, actuated or “vested” in him by separate action related to the “Holy Melchesdick” priesthood.³²

What was implied in Whitney’s claim to authority was made explicit in the instructions to and the blessings given the bride and groom. As I read these words, listen to the extent to which priestly rights were not only the means by which this marriage was performed, but also its object. Or, in other words, patriarchal priesthood was both the authority by which this marriage ceremony was performed, and it was the authority being given the couple in the nuptial. After the exchange of vows by the couple, Whitney commanded the bride that she was “to observe all the rights between you both that belong to that [marital] condition.” Note that the word *rights* was used where one would expect *duties*. This marriage ceremony was primarily a means of bestowing rights on the parties. Indeed, by comparison to other liturgies of the period, the Whitney-Smith nuptials were remarkably devoid of any reference to duties except a vow to “be each others companions,” which was unembellished.

By contrast, in the Methodist liturgy of 1845, for example, the groom promised to love, comfort, honor, and keep the bride. The bride was to obey, serve, love, honor, and keep the groom. There is no mention of rights, much less priestly rights arising from the marriage. To the contrary, the Methodist officiator was required to remind the couple that marriage was “ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication: that such persons as have not the gift of continency, might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body.” Not surprisingly, then, none of the duties imposed on the couple had a sanctifying dimension. As John Calvin had put it to his followers, marriage was “a good and holy ordinance of God, just like farming, building, cobbling, and barbering.”³³ Similarly, the Methodist ceremony ended with an invocation of God’s favor upon the couple that “ye may so live together

32. “Revelations Collections, circa 1831–1876,” MS 4583, LDS Church Library.

33. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV (1559), Ford Lewis Battles, trans., LCC, XXI, 1480, quoted in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 1992) 227.

in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting.”³⁴ Marriage was a blessed but temporal and temporary estate.

The Whitney-Smith wedding also ended with blessings, but they could not have been more different than their Methodist counterpart. I have time to mention only one that took the form of a command. Father Whitney “command[ed] in the name of the Lord all *those* powers [“ of the Priest Hood vested in me”] to concentrate in you and through to your posterity.” With these words the couple was linked to the powers of their Holy Progenitors. The priestly authority of parents and Holy Progenitors—or their “Priest Hood” birthrights—were vested or belonged to, even “concentrated in” the bride and groom. Thus, we see that Whitney not only used priestly authority to marry the couple; he conveyed that authority to them. The difference between the two marriage rituals—Methodist and Mormon—could not have been more extreme.

Not least among those differences was the fact that the Whitney-Smith marriage explicitly included wives and mothers and brides in a “Priest Hood” of the “Holy Progenitors.” Not only did the more gender-neutral reference to progenitors bespeak a parental, not merely fatherly authority, but also Elizabeth Ann Whitney’s name was invoked as legitimating the “giving” of her daughter in marriage. Finally, Sarah Ann was instructed to exercise rights that arose from her marriage. To paraphrase the New Testament ideal, in Mormonism, the fathers were not without the mothers in priesthood. Or in the context of our discussion tonight, this was the Mormon version of a “fair firm league” created by marriage. Men could not be patriarchs without matriarchs and vice versa.

Significantly, the wife’s priestly identity and rights were not derived from the husband’s any more than his were from hers. Wives had their own commission, though it was not in its effect different from that of husbands. You may remember my earlier reference to Fanny’s disappointment that the Saints were not taught that the object of marriage was “the indissoluble union of two souls,” but rather “the increase of children.”³⁵ Elizabeth Kane, too, noted her hosts’ peculiar beliefs in this

34. Robert Emory, *History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (NY: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1845) n.p. The Anglican rite of the period required that, prior to blessing the couple, the minister give an “address on the duties of husbands and wives.” This was evidently too didactic for America’s Wesleyans since they removed the instruction from their book of order.

35. Stenhouse, *Tell It All*, 343.

regard, but with a very telling difference. She records her surprise at a mother's lament for the loss of twin baby girls. "It had been," Elizabeth admitted, "one of the accepted beliefs with which my mind was stocked before entering Utah, that every mother would be found to regret the birth of a daughter as a misfortune. This is not so. They honestly believe in the grand calling their theology assigns to women; that of endowing souls with tabernacles that they may accept redemption."³⁶ In Mormonism, the power to birth was related to the power to redeem or to save souls, not merely to numerical increase. This is confirmed by Orson Pratt's 1852 account of a plural marriage in which the groom and bride, whether she be a first or fifth wife, are commanded to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, that you may have joy and rejoicing in your posterity in the day of the Lord Jesus" or the day of salvation.³⁷ Plural marriages, at least as performed in Joseph Smith and Brigham Young's eras, bestowed upon their participants powers that made of childbirth and childrearing priestly acts requiring exercise of salvific powers.

That women understood themselves to have such powers was apparent to Elizabeth Kane because she was able to make the connection between childbirth and redemption that Fanny could not. There were, however, more apparent examples of this connection in nineteenth-century rites officiated, respectively, by women and men—the women washing, anointing, and sealing blessings on their sisters for birth; the men rebirthing children through rituals of baptism, confirmation, and ordination. Speaking more cosmically, the one group was engaged in priestly acts of literally birthing or endowing a spirit with a body to make of it a living soul. The other group was engaged in priestly acts of administering ordinances preparatory to the ultimate rebirth of resurrection.

Nineteenth-century Mormonism was a temple-centered community immersed in ritualized covenants that held individuals in a network of people with saving powers. The function of the temple liturgy was to create that saving network. This is one of Mormonism's most fundamental and enduring paradoxes: it attempts to create highly individuated persons with rights to exercise the powers of heaven by attaching them to a tightly bound, earthly community. Plural marriage was no exception.

36. Kane, *Twelve Homes*, 77.

37. Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, Vol.1, No.2, p.31-32 (Feb, 1853).

The independence of those who thrived in it was produced by at least two phenomena. First, they were secured in the required reciprocity of a gendered priestly order created by their temple rituals. Further security was found, as we have seen, in the extension of these covenant bonds to others by means of additional marital sealings. Where successful, these intimate networks of multiple marriages constituted, in modern psychological terms, a basis for psychological individuation that enabled what appears to have been an unusual degree of independence. Such independence was a positive, religiously based ethic placed in service to a highly gendered, priestly order. Each gender served in its course and was capable of standing alone in the mediation of divine power because of the reciprocity of the secure and intimate network of highly ritualized, covenant attachments that upheld them.

Arguably, the earliest articulation of the terms of that covenant was given in what was probably the first temple ritual, the greeting used in the Kirtland School of the Prophets during the 1830s, but meant for all “those who are called to the ministry in the church.” “I salute you,” their teacher was to say, “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in token or remembrance of the everlasting covenant, in which covenant I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend and brother through the grace of God in the bonds of love, to walk in all the commandments of God blameless, in thanksgiving, forever and ever.”³⁸ I suggest that this was the nature of love in plural marriage. It was a love subordinated to religious devotion and ordered by religious, not romantic ideals.

To Fanny Stenhouse, the highest object of marriage for a woman was “to know that she alone rules [in her husband’s heart] . . . its sole queen and mistress.”³⁹ Did those who thrived in plural marriage desire to rule in each other’s hearts? Not if they kept the vows of their marriage. Or, we could say, they had bigger ambitions. In 1873, at the same time as Fanny was writing of her marital aspirations, Relief Society President Eliza R. Snow was sermonizing on those of the Saints: “You, my sisters, if you are faithful, will become Queens of Queens, and Priestesses unto the Most High God. These are your callings.”⁴⁰ These aspirations—premiered on religious ideals, formalized in LDS temple rites, and socially

38. *History of the Church* 1:311, canonized as D&C 88:127.

39. Stenhouse, *Exposé of Polygamy* 144.

40. Eliza R. Snow, “An Address,” *Women’s Exponent* 2 (15 September 1873) 62.

structured in plural marriage—dramatically challenged not only the sexual, but also the emotional norms of nineteenth-century marriage. The challenge was great enough or, to return to the terms of my title, the logic of Mormon marriage was foreign enough that many concluded plural marriage survived only through indifference to love itself. No doubt, for some that was true, but others, like the McDiamands for instance, lived as Elizabeth Kane said “on very different terms. There [wa]s something in their manner to each other which, if they were not Mormons, would gladden the heart . . . as proof that after twenty years of wedlock; there could still be married lovers.”⁴¹ These marriages, too, require our attention if we are to ever understand the logic of Mormonism’s plural marriages.

41. Kane, *A Gentile Account*, 123.